

Alternatives in Teaching

Mirial J. GAINER

Do what you've never done before,
See what you've never seen,
Feel what you've never felt before,
Say what you've never said.
Bear what you've never borne before,
Hear what you've never heard.
All is not what it would seem,
Nothing remains the same.
Change is life's characteristic,
Bend and flow and play the game. . .
So many times I was the one
Who stopped myself from doing things,
So many times I was the one
Who grounded myself and clipped my wings.
So I say do what you've never done before. . .
You must go where you have never been. . .

Donovan Leitch

THE PROBLEM

What denotes good teaching? What are we as teachers trying to accomplish? What are our methods? These and other questions need to be examined, especially in light of public pressure for quality education. The "Back to Basics" movement in the United States signifies a concern about current education in general. The competency controversy focuses on the teacher and his methods in particular. Within each discipline of learning, goals and objectives

are determined, a rationale for teaching is constructed, and, if necessary, a defense for the inclusion of that discipline in the curriculum is prepared. Benjamin Bloom in his *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives* (1956) mentions three domains common to all disciplines. They are cognitive, affective, and psychomotor. Each of these can be expanded as follows :

- | | |
|---------------|--|
| Cognitive : | Knowledge
Comprehension
Application
Analysis
Synthesis
Evaluation |
| Affective : | Receiving
Responding
Valuing
Organizing
Characterizing by a whole value
complex |
| Psychomotor : | Skills
Mind directed activities |

According to Bloom, cognitive is the domain easiest to accomplish in teaching. Unfortunately, the affective domain is usually the area in which we most want to make an impact. And the psychomotor domain is even less developed than the other two. Yet students need development in each of these three areas in order to be prepared for the real world they must face in society at large.

In English, especially, trying to meet the demands of society may raise more questions than can possibly be solved. This discipline is more difficult to defend ; its goals and objectives more difficult to pinpoint and evaluate. In consequence, teachers have often taken a

Alternatives in Teaching

“fact-centered” view of English. That is, that the English course is a body of facts, information, ideas, concepts and books that a student must “master”. In discussing the aims and values of English teaching, Benjamin DeMott (“Reading, Writing, Reality, Unreality . . .” quoted in Judy, 1971) has given a description of what English is not.

English is not centrally about the difference between good books and bad. It is not centrally about poetics, metrics, mysteries of versification, or the study of balance and antithesis in the Ciceronian sentence. It is not centrally about the history of literature, not centrally about changes in the moral and philosophical systems as these can be deduced from abstracts of selected Great Works. Still more negatives: the English classroom is not primarily the place where students learn the majesty of Shakespeare and alas for Beaumont and Fletcher. It is not primarily the place where students learn to talk about the structure of a poem or about the logic of the octave or sestet, or about the relation between the narrator and author and speaker and mock-speaker and reader and mock-reader of the poem. It is not primarily the place where students learn to mind their proper manners at the spelling table or to expand their vocabulary or to write Correct like nice folks. It is not a finishing school, not a laff riot with a “swinging prof”, not an archeological site.

DeMott then goes on to describe what he views to be the true function of the English class.

It is the place—there is no other in most schools—the place wherein the chief matters of concern are particulars of humanness—individual human feeling, human response, and human time, as these can be known through the written expression (at many literary levels) of men living and dead,

as they can be discovered by student writers seeking through words to name and compose and grasp their own experience.

His contention is that the main concern of English teaching is the student. English is not merely a body of facts to be learned. Rather, English is that which enables the student to grow as a person and as a user of language. Reading, writing, listening and speaking, together, offer a set of experiences to facilitate change in the student.

This is not to say that facts are unimportant. Facts are to be dealt with, but in such a way that the teacher can act as a catalyst, or facilitator, in the quest for knowledge and not as a mere dispenser of that knowledge.

David Angus (1971) considers the discipline of English as an affirmation of classic values which are repeatedly expressed in literature and language. These values are seen in

the mighty themes of engagement and disengagement between men and their fellow men and women, between men and inscrutable forces in the universe. The value of engagement affirms the belief that by joining and contending, men develop and grow wiser through age and experience; the worth of disengagement lies in the opportunities sensible men have for analysis, assessment and independent reflection.

He continues by saying that this discipline is a point of contact between students and the craftsmen who were willing to communicate not only facts but also feeling. Through this discipline students have the means to "broaden and inform" their own experiences.

Our teaching methods will reflect our view of English. If we regard English as a body of knowledge, then we will be led to teacher dominated instructional methods. The teacher, as the "expert", will

Alternatives in Teaching

spend much of his time, even in “discussions”, talking. In such situations, the teacher is actively involved—but not the student. Teacher dominance will be evident regardless of the form the class takes (Judy, 1971):

lecture, discussions (of questions to which the teacher has the established answer), small group work (where the students will, sooner or later, do what is expected of them), or inductive discovery (where the teacher knows at the beginning of the hour what the students will discover toward the close).

If the primary goal is to teach students what the teacher already knows, teacher dominance will continue. If, on the other hand, we are more concerned in the “process of becoming” than in a body of facts, a student-oriented English class will result.

THE POSSIBILITIES

The key to the success of teaching the discipline of English, whatever our view, lies ultimately in the teacher. He alone must decide how to present his material. Often, he limits himself in his presentation simply because he is unaware of the possibilities—possibilities that exist through the personality he possesses and possibilities that exist through the methods he does not consider.

Effective teaching includes extensive preparation and intensive insight, exacting self-assessment and delicate self-revelation, orchestrated by the teacher’s personality, projecting glimpses of what we can become. (Rood and Kirk)

Each of us has a creative teaching personality. The uniqueness and essence it will have, depends primarily on how we view ourselves.

Often we decrease our effectiveness through not understanding or not accepting ourselves. *Please Understand Me* (Keirsey and Bates, 1978) and *The Making of a Christian Leader* (Engstrom, 1979) explain the types of personalities with an emphasis on turning points considered to be weaknesses into strengths. Self-assessment is a good first step in determining one's creative teaching personality.

Once we can determine our individual creativity as teachers, then we can consider ways to improve our teaching. Attention should focus on "becoming more competent in our fields, more rigorous in our planning, more artful in our strategies" (Rood and Kirk). At this point, we need to know what strategies are possible. The effective teacher has many methods from which to choose. No one method will be suitable for all students in all situations. And certainly, the teacher must be comfortable with the strategies he chooses. Possible methods include

Audiovisual	Individualized instruction
Committee activity	Inquiry
Computerized instruction	Laboratory
Debate	Learning activity packets
Demonstration	Lecture
Discovery	Library/resource center/ media center
Discussion (large group/ small group)	Panel
Dramatization	Problem solving (analysis)
Drill	Question and answer
Field trip	Review and practice
Games	Role playing
Group therapy/encounter experiences/sensitivity awareness	Roundtable
Guest speaker	Self-instructional packages
Independent study (research)	Study guides
	Supervised study
	Symposium

Alternatives in Teaching

Teaching machines
Team learning

Team teaching
(Kim and Kellough, 1974)

Some of these strategies lend themselves to the discipline of English more readily than others. We will probably never use all of the methods possible. The above were given, however, to make the point that more methods are available than perhaps we are aware. There is one method that teachers consistently use in conjunction with other methods, since it serves numerable learning purposes. That strategy is question and answer. A skillful teacher can turn questioning into an art. Norris Sanders (1966) points out the dangers in misusing this method and ways to rectify the problems. He explains that Bloom's *Taxonomy* applies to types of questions as well as to learning in general. Most of our questions, unfortunately, are geared to simple memory. Good use of questions, though, will draw from all levels of the *Taxonomy*.

Given the availability of an assortment of strategies from which to choose, how do we decide? A set of criteria for the selection of a method by Ronald Hyman (*Ways of Teaching* quoted in Kim and Kellough) states that the teaching method should

1. Suit the teacher's abilities, knowledge of subject matter, and interests. That is, the teacher should... continually develop those methods which he finds compatible with his abilities and inclinations.
2. Suit the student's abilities—verbal and psychomotor. That is, if the students were unable to deliver long prepared statements on their viewpoints, it would be unwise to choose a method that requires them to do so.
3. Suit the types of teaching aimed at: teaching how to... (skill oriented), teaching that...(knowledge oriented), or teaching to be...(value oriented).
4. Suit the time and place context of the teaching situation.

5. Suit the subject matter at hand....The methods appropriate for teaching archaeology will differ from those for teaching mathematics.
6. Suit the number of students being taught.
7. Suit the interests and experience of the students....Variety in methods is advantageous.
8. Suit the student's relationship with the subject matter. For example, for an introductory class...the teacher would do well to choose a method that will familiarize the students with fundamental terms and skills.
9. Suit the teacher's relationship with the student. For example, if the teacher has not yet established mutual trust, the method selected should lead to such trust.

The use of the above criteria naturally entails an evaluation of current classes and strategies. Such an evaluation may reveal both strengths and weaknesses in current methods. Also, it may point out the need for change.

THE PROJECT

A practical application of the import of this paper was made in the form of a teaching project. The project involved two second year English Reading classes of Hokusei University in the fall of 1980 (Project repeated in fall of 1981 with modifications).

First, an evaluation was made of the situation. The evaluation showed that the students were bored and put little of themselves into the class; they did the absolute minimum or less, generally; and little creativity in writing or thinking was in evidence. Further, the evaluation showed that the teacher was frustrated by a lack of response from the students, by a lack of creativity from herself, and by a lack of variety in her teaching methods.

Next, goals were defined. The goals chosen were two-fold:

Alternatives in Teaching

Generate interest in the subject matter to the extent that students would read above the required minimum ; and Get students actively involved in the learning situation. At this point, the following possibilities (among many) were seriously considered : students as class leaders, large/small/one-to-one discussion groupings, oral reports of outside reading/research, book report presentations (not written in form but creative), more/less exercise and practice assignments from the text, movie viewing, new text (not really feasible at that time), or a new teacher (also not feasible). Methods actually used included small and one-to-one groups, book report presentations, less exercise assignments from the text, more outside reading/research assigned for generating discussions, movie viewing, and values clarification activities.

Then, the topic "Marriage" was selected for the unit of study. This topic was heavily represented in the text and was one in which the students showed some interest. For clarification, a course description, objectives, course requirements, and evaluation criteria were written. Handouts and forms for students were prepared. (See Appendix for partial reproduction)

Finally, the unit was presented to the students. Since the methods for conducting the class were to be rather different than in the past, an explanation was made. The areas of responsibility for students and teacher were discussed as well as the purpose of the unit. The teacher was primarily to act as resource person and as facilitator for activities. Students were given a schedule and assignment handouts for the unit. Next, they were divided into the first of many small groups. Then, they began the unit by using exercises designed for small group interaction, which helped set the atmosphere needed for the study.

Among resources used were faculty and family members, the movie "Kramer vs Kramer", religious leaders and the Bible for the Christian/Church view of marriage and divorce, statistics of trends in

Japan and America, and Bledsoe's "Attitude Determination Reactions List" (1977).

At the end of the unit, evaluations were made by both the students and the teacher. The student evaluations indicated that the students had been actively involved and enjoyed the study, even though more work than usual had been required. Also, the variety of teaching strategies gave all students an opportunity to take part creatively. The teacher evaluation showed an increase in student interest and performance. She noted that often students who said they did not have an opinion in the beginning became some of the most vehement participants in the small discussions. Other students who had not volunteered information first semester began to do so in many of the classes. Also, the teacher as well as the students evidenced growth in creativity and knowledge.

IN CONCLUSION

This project was valuable in determining that alternatives in teaching actually exist. The instances in which teaching is non-productive or counter-productive are often the result of a slavish dependence on habit and a lack of periodic re-evaluation. Thus, to be productive as an educator is to be open to change.

Teaching is an art and must be exercised as such. In English, this art can be seen as a drama which concerns life itself, and the teacher is the one who sets the stage. But the teacher is not limited to mere staging and properties. He must also function creatively as the script writer, as the director, and as one of the actors. The effective teacher will experience change within himself as he strives to be all of those things and many more. But with his striving, he will be the instrument of change for his students. To the extent that the teacher knows what the possibilities or alternatives are and creatively uses those possibilities, to that extent he will affect his

students—and through them, society at large.

In a world of increasingly complex stresses, personal and cultural, we can no longer afford to use our creative abilities only to solve specific problems here and there. Our health and sanity require that we learn how to live lives that are genuinely creative.

Marilyn Ferguson

RESOURCES

- Angus, David Robertson. "Are There Alternatives to 'English'?" *Lecture Alternatives in Teaching English*. Lansing: Michigan Council of Teachers of English, 1971.
- Bledsoe, Eugene. "Teaching About Divorce." *Thematic Units in Teaching English and the Humanities: First Supplement*. Urbana: NCTE, 1977.
- Bloom, Benjamin S., editor. *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives*. New York: Longmans, 1956.
- Engstrom, Ted W. *The Making of a Christian Leader*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1979.
- Ferguson, Marilyn. *The Aquarian Conspiracy: Personal and Social Transformation in the 1980s*. Los Angeles: J. P. Tarcher, 1981.
- Hollman, Jeffrey. "Games to Promote Creativity." *English Journal*, January 1981.
- Judy, Stephen. "Lecture Alternatives and the English Class." *Lecture Alternatives in Teaching English*. Lansing: Michigan Council of Teachers of English, 1971.
- Keirse, David and Bates, Marilyn. *Please Understand Me*. Del Mar: Promethean Books, Inc., 1978.
- Kim, Eugene C. and Kellough, Richard D. *A Resource Guide for Secondary School Teaching: Planning for Competence*. New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, Inc., 1974.
- Loban, Walter; Ryan, Margaret; and Squire, James R. *Teaching Language and Literature*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and World,

- Inc., 1969.
- Luft, Joseph. *Group Processes*. Palo Alto : Mayfield Publishing Company, 1970.
- NCTE Committee on Classroom Practices in Teaching English. *Classroom Practices in Teaching English 1977-1978 : Teaching the Basics—Really!*. Urbana : NCTE, 1977.
- _____. *Classroom Practices in Teaching English 1978-1979 : Activating the Passive Student*. Urbana : NCTE, 1978.
- Postman, Neil. *Teaching as a Conserving Activity*. New York : Dell Publishing Company, 1979.
- Rice, Frank M. *English and Its Teaching*. Lincoln : Professional Educators Publications, Inc., 1972.
- Rood, Raymond and Kirk, David. "Creative Teaching Personality : New Synthesis." Unpublished paper. Azusa Pacific University, undated.
- Sanders, Norris M. *Classroom Questions : What Kinds ?*. New York : Harper and Row, 1966.
- Schultz, Fred, editor. *Education 80/81*. Guilford, CT. : The Dushkin Publishing Group, Inc., 1980.
- Simon, Sidney B. ; Howe, Leland W. ; and Kirschenbaum, Howard. *Values Clarification*. New York : A & W Visual Library, 1978.
- Squire, James R., editor. *The Teaching of English*. Seventy-sixth Yearbook, Vol. I. Bloomington : NSSE, 1977.
- Walsh, Robert F. "On Weeding the Garden." *English Journal*, April 1981.

APPENDIX

- A. For clarification a course description, objectives, course requirements, and evaluation criteria were written.

Description : Past and Present Attitudes Toward Marriage

This study should be of help to the student in determining his own views and values. It will focus on current problems concerning marriage and possible solutions to those problems. It will also explore the traditional concepts of role and position. Cultural differ-

Alternatives in Teaching

ences will also be considered.

Objectives : The learner

- 1.0 Understands current problems concerning marriage
 - 1.1 Identifies problems
 - 1.2 Comprehends basic causes of problems
 - 1.3 Distinguishes between relevant and irrelevant arguments applied to problems
 - 1.5 Evaluates problems
- 2.0 Recognizes apparant changes in concepts of role and position
 - 2.1 Identifies traditional concepts
 - 2.2 Identifies current concepts
 - 2.3 Identifies possible causes
 - 2.4 Analyses change
- 3.0 Recognizes apparant trends in marriage and divorce practices
 - 3.1 Interprets opinions of public
 - 3.2 Interprets opinions of leaders/church leaders
 - 3.3 Identifies current trends
 - 3.4 Predicts future trends
 - 3.5 Analyses possible effect on own decision making
- 4.0 Demonstrates acceptable competence in expression in English
 - 4.1 Writes clearly and logically
 - 4.2 Participates in class activities
 - 4.3 Organizes material presented
 - 4.4 Speaks clearly and logically in oral presentation of research and outside reading
 - 4.5 Summarizes pertinent ideas/information

Requirements :

1. Class attendance and participation in class activities
2. Reading of text materials
3. Supplemental reading and book report presentation
4. Research project

Grading :

1. Completion of requirements in an acceptable way will result in a grade of B

2. Deficiencies in meeting requirements will result in lower grades
 3. Work showing a high level of excellence and creativity will merit an A
- B.** Various handouts were written. Some were used for generating discussions, as the "Attitude Determination Reaction List" (which, incidently, does *not* necessarily reflect the views held by the teacher). Others were used to give students information concerning assignments. Three are given here.

ATTITUDE DETERMINATION REACTION LIST (adapted): You are to consider the following statements. Write your reactions to each statement in your notebook. Your reactions will be the basis for a discussion to be held in class.

1. Women need marriage ; men do not.
2. Men are the natural masters of women.
3. Money is of less importance in a marriage than love.
4. The children's discipline is the husband's responsibility.
5. Husbands should do little or no housework.
6. Some people should never marry.
7. Without children, a marriage cannot be a happy one.
8. Women marry for love and children ; men marry for sex.
9. A person should not marry outside his racial or religious background.
10. Divorce always is better than an unhappy marriage.
11. Men are generally more unfaithful to marriage vows than women are.
12. Marriage no longer is necessary or generally desirable. (Marriage is not necessary or desirable in general any longer.)
13. Children should be the most important concern in a divorce.
14. Divorce should be easier legally.
15. Marriage should be more difficult legally.
16. Property in a divorce should go to the partner who paid the most for it.
17. Women's liberation means the end of marriage.
18. Women should be free to have and raise children without getting married, if they want to.

Alternatives in Teaching

19. Marriage is an ever-developing partnership which requires that both husband and wife be flexible and capable of change. They should become more deeply involved with each other as time passes.
20. Marriage partners should be unrestricted in "finding themselves" personally (as individuals).
21. Debts can ruin a marriage.
22. It is all right to marry to keep from being alone.
23. The law should require any couple seeking divorce to have a trial separation and to have sessions with a marriage counselor.
24. There is no such thing as a "friendly" divorce.
25. Children should participate in discussions of their parents' divorce.
26. Divorce is destroying the American/Japanese family life.

IDEAS FOR RESEARCH : You must choose *one* of the following ideas for careful research. Arrange your findings in written form for presentation to the class.

1. Study the psychosomatic and physiological illnesses caused by the stress of marriage problems or divorce (as ulcers, headaches, backaches, etc.).
2. Research the past and present attitudes toward divorce in Japan/America.
3. Study the change in divorce rate from the past to the present in Japan. Include a chart in your presentation which shows this change.
4. Collect current songs which have the theme of parting, separation, divorce, or loss of love ; and present them to the class. Include your own opinions of these songs.
5. Research the changing (or unchanging) attitude of the Christian Church toward divorce.
6. Read at least four chapters from the book *Why We Are Happily Married*. Present the ideas found in those chapters to the class. (Two copies can be found in the library on reserve. The books are to be read in the library *only*, so that all students who need to will have access to them. Please *do not remove* them from the library.)
7. Research the idea of marriage in the Bible. Present the Biblical view,

with your own comments, to the class.

8. An idea of your own, approved by the teacher.

BOOK REPORT PRESENTATION GUIDE : The student will choose *one* of the following forms of presentation for book report credit and make the presentation in front of the class.

1. Design a book jacket for your book. The cover should be appropriately illustrated and the inner flaps must contain a brief synopsis (summary) of the contents. This summary will be read to the class.
2. Design and make a poster to promote your book. The poster will include a strategically placed 100-word (maximum) review of the book, as well as illustrations and other eye-catching details.
3. Write, memorize, and perform a two (2) minute TV commercial message about your book. Use props, special effects, etc. to make it "sell".
4. Give a five (5) minute dramatic presentation in which you impersonate (act as) one of the characters of your book. As that person, share the most exciting experiences of that character. You may use a costume, props, etc. for this presentation.
5. Use an idea of your own. This idea must be discussed and approved by the teacher before presenting it to the class.

NOTE : Many students used ideas of their own which were creative and interesting for the research and the book report presentations.

- C. Forms for small group discussions were used to help students evaluate their own participation and to help the teacher in class management. Two examples are given here.

Alternatives in Teaching

INDIVIDUAL PARTICIPATION FORM

Topic : _____ Date : _____

What was your function in the group?

How well did you contribute to the discussion? (Circle the appropriate response.)

A Little Very Much Not At All

Comments : _____

What language did you use in your discussion?

How well do you think other members in your group participated?

Did you come to class prepared for the discussion?

NAME/NUMBER : _____

DISCUSSION GROUP FORM

Topic : _____ Date : _____

Group Members : Leader _____

Secretary _____

Alternatives in Teaching

Mirial J. GAINER

Contents :

1. The Problem
2. The Possibilities
3. The Project
4. In Conclusion

This paper was written in an attempt to explore possible alternatives in teaching, especially in the discipline of English. The research culminated in a practical application which took the form of a teaching project.

The conclusion drawn was that more alternatives *are* available than we perhaps realize. Often we find ourselves involved in non-productive or counter-productive classroom situations as a result of a slavish dependence on habit and a lack of periodic re-evaluation of teaching methods.

Therefore, we need to be more aware of what we are doing as well as of what we could be doing. To be productive is to be open to change, for the essence of teaching *is* change.